

The Rulers of Egypt

Prepare to Read

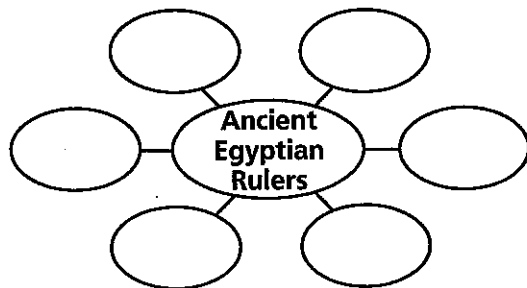
Objectives

In this section you will

1. Learn about the history of kingship in ancient Egypt.
2. Find out about Egypt's accomplishments during each of the three kingdom periods.
3. Understand what characterized the rule of Egypt during the New Kingdom period.

Taking Notes

As you read, look for the main ideas about ancient Egyptian rulers. Copy the diagram below, and record your findings in it.



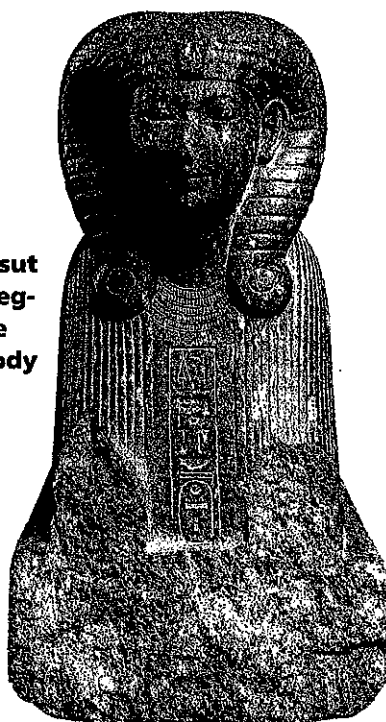
Target Reading Skill

Use Context Clues When you read an unfamiliar word, you can sometimes figure out its meaning from clues in the context. Sometimes the context will restate the word. The following phrase, for example, restates the meaning of *sphinx*: "a legendary creature with a lion's body and a human head." As you read, look at the context for the word *timber* on page 78. What do you think *timber* means?

Key Terms

- **pharaoh** (FEHR oh) *n.* the title of the kings of ancient Egypt
- **dynasty** (DY nus tee) *n.* a series of rulers from the same family or ethnic group
- **absolute power** (AB suh loot POW ur) *n.* complete control over someone or something
- **regent** (REE junt) *n.* someone who rules for a child until the child is old enough to rule

A sculpture of Queen Hatshepsut as a sphinx, a legendary creature with a lion's body and a human head



She seized control of Egypt's throne and made herself **pharaoh** (FEHR oh), the title used by the kings of Egypt. Hatshepsut (haht SHEP soot) was not the only woman to rule Egypt. But the title of pharaoh was traditionally held by men. Hatshepsut took on all the responsibilities of a pharaoh. Sometimes she even wore the false beard traditionally worn by pharaohs. Like all Egyptian pharaohs, Hatshepsut controlled the wealth and power of a great civilization.

Egyptian Kingship

Hatshepsut was one of many famous Egyptian pharaohs who ruled Egypt. Some, like her, were wise. Others were careless or cruel. Egypt's fortunes rested on the strength of its pharaohs.

From Dynasty to Dynasty The history of ancient Egypt is the history of each of its dynasties. A **dynasty** is a series of rulers from the same family or ethnic group. Egypt had 31 dynasties, from about 3100 B.C. until it was conquered in 332 B.C. Historians group Egypt's dynasties into three major time periods, called kingdoms. The earliest major time period is called the Old Kingdom. Next comes the Middle Kingdom. The latest time period is called the New Kingdom. The timeline titled Major Time Periods in Ancient Egypt on page 76 shows the approximate dates of each kingdom. Remember, these kingdoms are not places. They are time periods.

The gaps between the kingdoms were times of troubles—wars, invasions, or weak rulers. These in-between periods were rare, however. For most of ancient Egyptian history, rule was stable.

Egypt Is Unified According to legend, Egypt's first dynasty began when a king named Menes (MEE neez) united Upper and Lower Egypt. Menes built a city named Memphis near the present-day city of Cairo (KY roh). From there, he ruled over the Two Lands, the name the ancient Egyptians gave to Upper and Lower Egypt. Carvings from Menes' time show a pharaoh named Narmer wearing two crowns—the white crown of Upper Egypt and the red crown of Lower Egypt. Some historians believe that Menes and Narmer may have been the same man. The unification of Egypt was the beginning of one of the most stable civilizations in history.

All-Powerful Pharaohs The pharaohs had absolute power, or complete control over their people. For help in making decisions, they could turn to their advisors or appeal to Ma'at, the goddess of truth. In the end, whatever the pharaoh decided became law. For example, he decided when the fields would be planted. At harvest time, he demanded crops from the workers in the fields.

The Narmer Palette

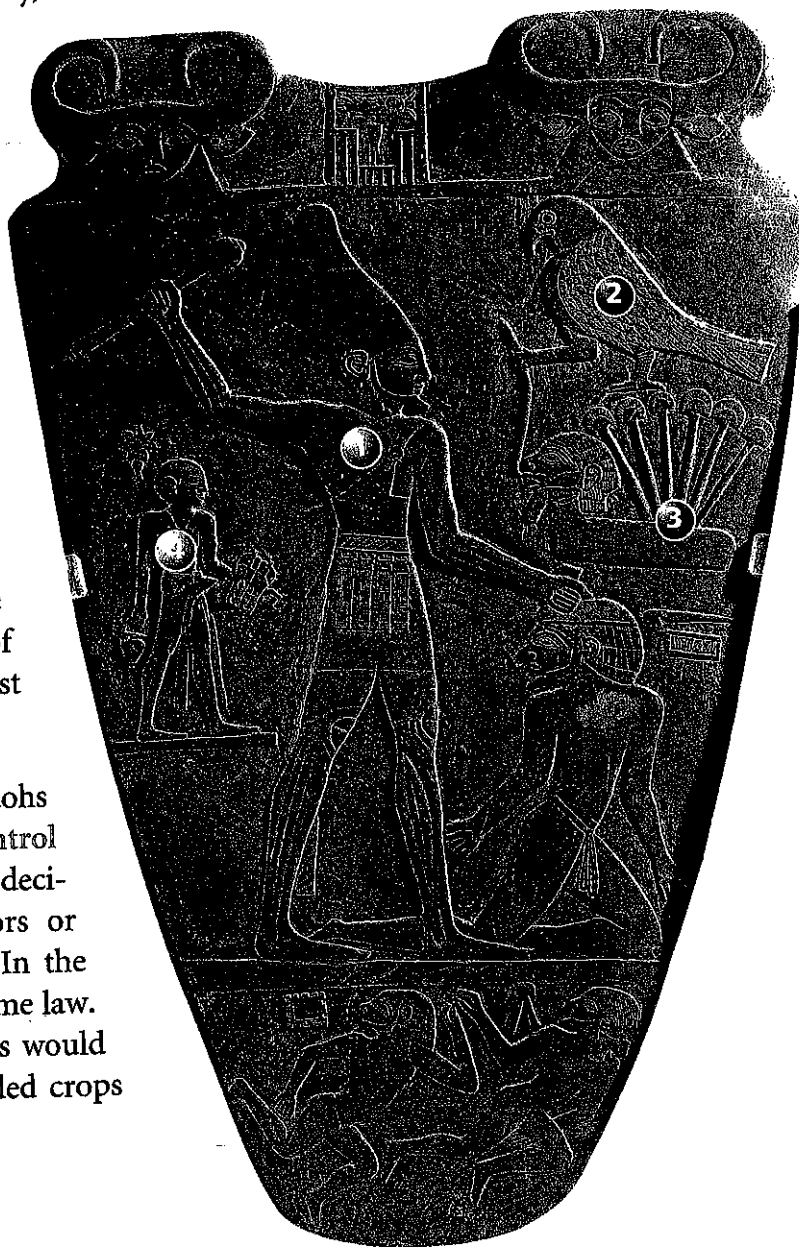
This two-sided tablet honors the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt by a king named Narmer.

➊ Narmer wears symbols of Egyptian kingship: the cone-shaped crown of Upper Egypt and a false beard and tail. He prepares to strike the enemy.

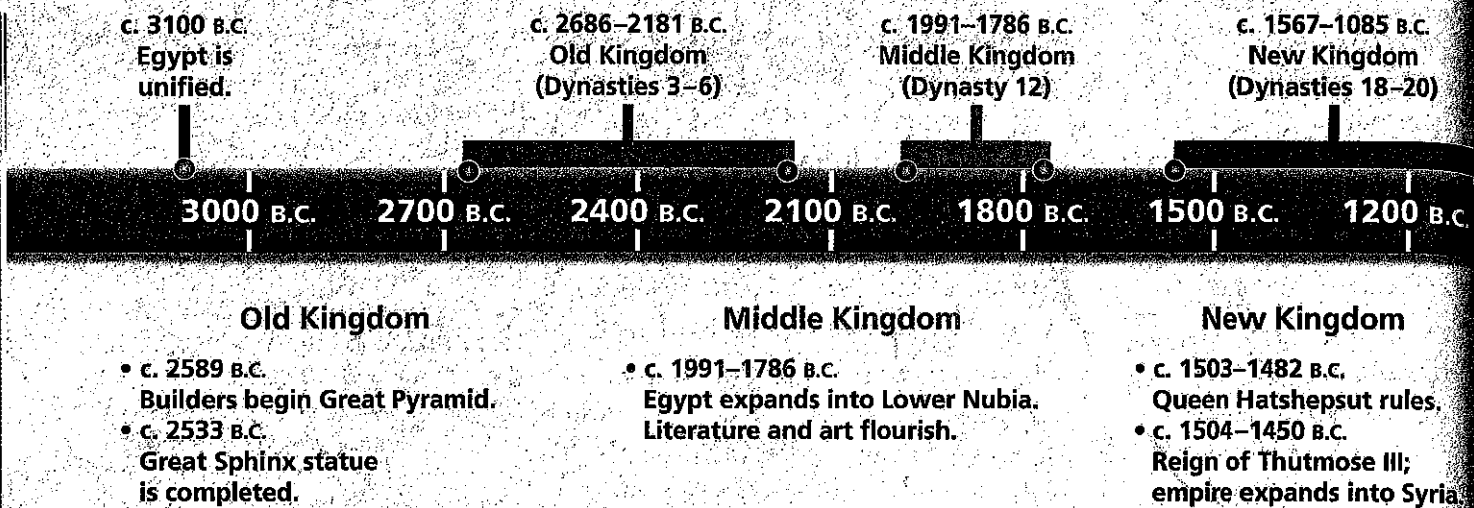
➋ The falcon represents Horus, the god of kingship.

➌ Reed plants, which grow in the Nile delta, represent Lower Egypt.

➍ A royal sandal bearer carries Narmer's shoes. **Predict** Narmer wears a different crown on the opposite side of the tablet. What crown do you think he wears?



Major Time Periods in Ancient Egypt



Timeline Skills

Notice the three time periods called kingdoms, as well as the number of years between the kingdoms.

Identify How many dynasties ruled from 2686 to 2181 B.C.? How many ruled from 2181 to 1991 B.C.? **Infer** During which of those two time periods was Egypt most stable? Explain your answer.

Ancient Egyptians believed that their pharaohs were the earthly form of Horus, the falcon god. Over time, pharaohs came to be connected with other gods, including the sun god Re (ray). In this way, the pharaohs were god-kings. It was the pharaoh, Egyptians believed, who provided his people with the Nile's yearly floods and the harvests that followed.

“He is the god Re whose beams enable us to see.
He gives more light to the Two Lands than the sun's disc.
He makes Earth more green than the Nile in flood.
He has filled the Two Lands with strength and life.”

—an official of ancient Egypt

✓ Reading Check Who was Menes and what did he accomplish?

The Three Kingdoms

Important events and achievements marked each of Egypt's three kingdoms. The Old Kingdom was noted for its well-run system of government.



Use Context Clues

If you do not know what timber is, look for context clues. Find a restatement of the word *timber*. Then reread what the Egyptians used timber for. What is timber?

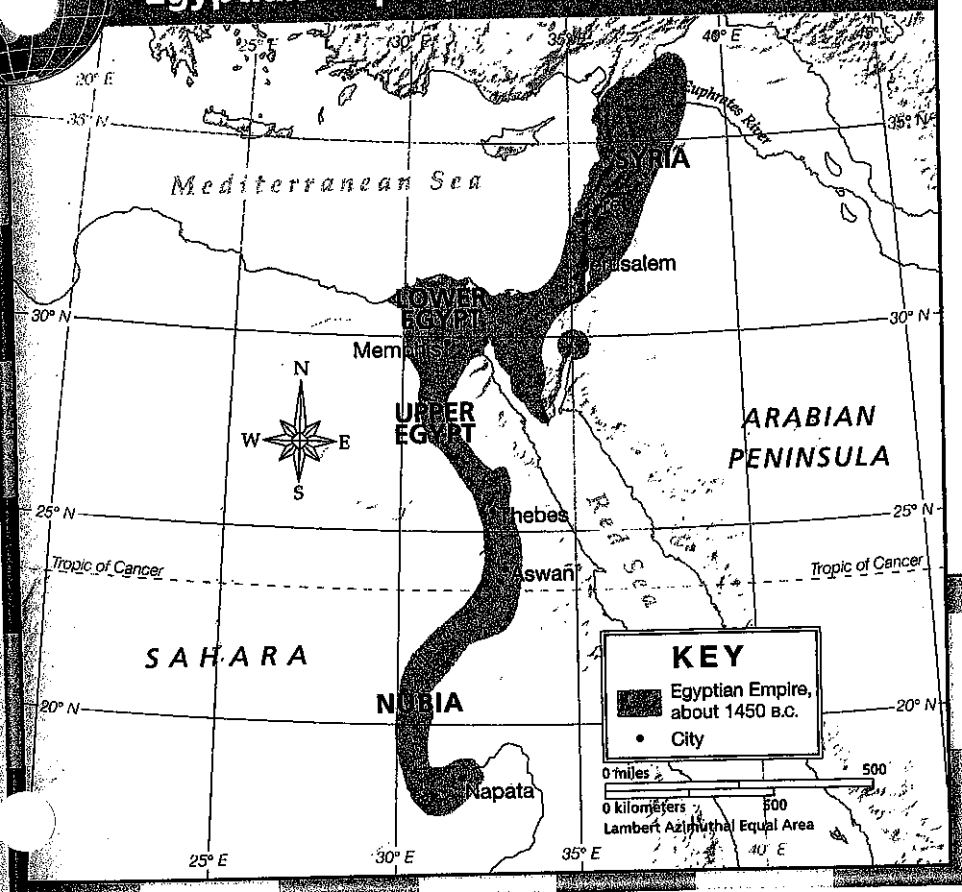
The Old Kingdom The Old Kingdom pharaohs kept the peace and traded with Nubia, with only occasional conflicts. They sent merchants to the eastern coast of the Mediterranean to find timber, trees used for building. The timber was used to make houses, boats, and furniture. Merchants may have traveled north across the Mediterranean in search of trade items.

Toward the end of the Old Kingdom, governors in the provinces began to challenge the power of the pharaohs' government. Egypt's unity crumbled, and the dynasties grew weak.



Egyptian Empire, About 1450 B.C.

MAP MASTER Skills Activity



Movement Egypt expanded its rule during the New Kingdom. As the empire grew, Egyptian goods and ideas reached new places.

Identify Which waterways could the Egyptians use to transport goods? **Infer** How did the empire's access to waterways help it to control the empire?

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map skills practice.

The Middle Kingdom The early rulers of the Middle Kingdom restored order and reunited the country. Pharaohs spent the nation's wealth on public works instead of on wars. For example, they constructed buildings and irrigation projects. Egypt grew even richer. However, weaker and less able rulers followed. In time, they lost control of the country to foreign invaders.

The New Kingdom Egyptian princes became strong enough to drive out the foreign invaders. This event marks the start of the New Kingdom, which began in 1567 B.C. The first pharaohs of the New Kingdom wanted to build an empire. They created huge armies of foot soldiers, mounted warriors, and charioteers. Bronze swords and body armor made the Egyptians nearly unbeatable. One New Kingdom pharaoh is of special interest to scholars. King Tutankhamen became ruler of Egypt while he was still a child. At about age 18 he died and was buried with many precious objects. An archaeologist discovered his tomb in 1922. Since then, studies of Tutankhamen's funeral treasures have taught us a great deal about the ancient Egyptians.

A gold portrait mask was one of the many treasures found in King Tutankhamen's tomb.



Reading Check What characterized each of the three kingdoms?

Rule During the New Kingdom

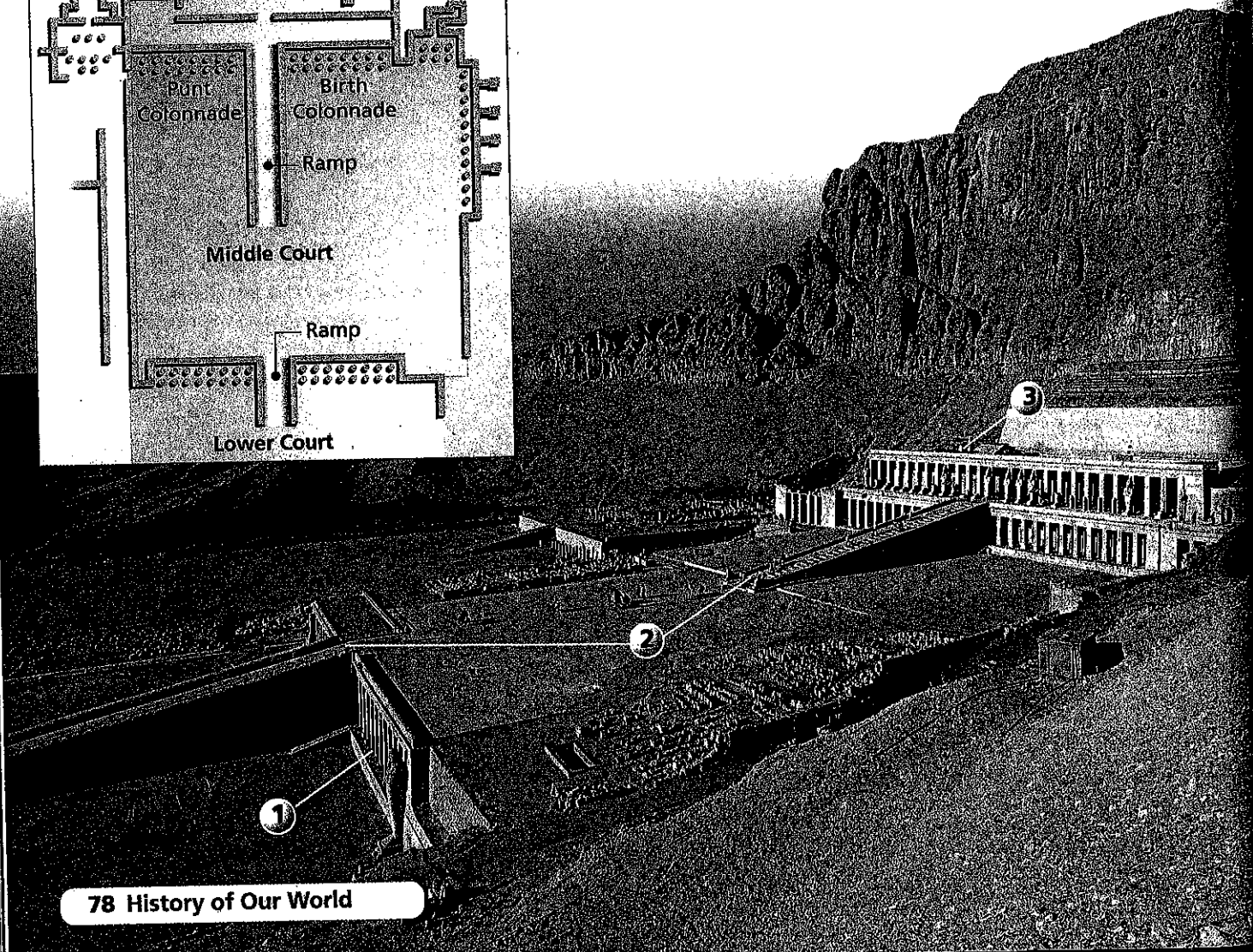
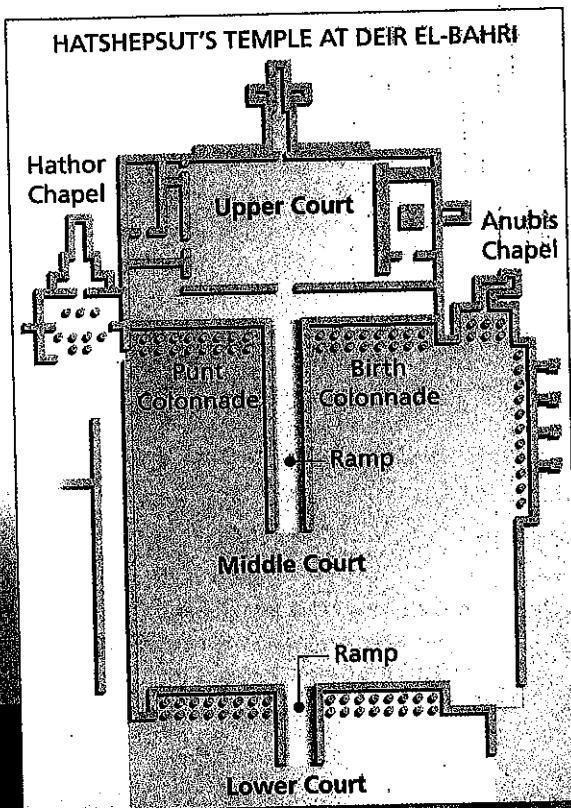
Deir el-Bahri, Thebes

This temple built by Queen Hatshepsut was set into a cliff on the west bank of the Nile River.

- 1 The lower court entrance was once planted with trees and vines.
- 2 Ramps lead visitors to the middle and upper levels.
- 3 Inside the colonnades are carvings honoring Hatshepsut's birth as well as a famous trade journey to Punt that she once sponsored. **Analyze** What features of Hatshepsut's temple would have impressed its visitors in ancient Egypt?

In 1504 B.C., a child named Thutmose III (thoot MOH suh) began his reign. Because of his youth, his stepmother was appointed regent. A regent is someone who rules for a child until the child is old enough to rule. His stepmother was Hatshepsut, whom you read about at the beginning of this section. Not content to be regent, Hatshepsut had herself proclaimed pharaoh. She was Egypt's supreme ruler for about 15 years.

The Pharaoh Queen Hatshepsut's reign was good for Egypt. She was a bold leader who is most known for creating a time of great peace and economic success. She encouraged trade with faraway places, sending a famous expedition to the land of Punt on the east coast of Africa. Egyptian traders returned with shiploads of ivory, leopard skins, and special trees used to make incense, a substance burned for its fragrance. When Thutmose grew up, Hatshepsut refused to yield the throne to him. After her death, Thutmose became pharaoh and destroyed all her statues. We don't know if Thutmose played a part in Hatshepsut's death.



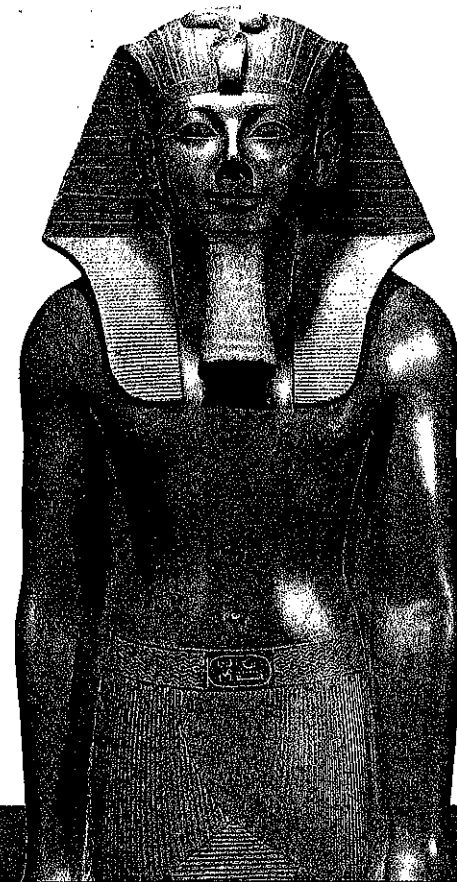
Thutmose III Rules Thutmose III became one of the greatest pharaohs of the New Kingdom. He led his army in wars against Syria and Phoenicia, in Southwest Asia. His troops advanced as far east as the Euphrates River and south into Nubia. Yet Thutmose was more than a conqueror. He was an educated man who loved to study plants. Unlike most rulers of his time, he treated those he defeated with mercy.

Ancient Egypt After the New Kingdom Toward the end of the New Kingdom, Egypt declined. Civil war left Egypt weak and poorly defended. In 332 B.C., long after the end of the New Kingdom, Egypt fell to the famous conqueror Alexander the Great of Macedonia. The Macedonians continued to rule Egypt for about 300 years.

In 51 B.C., Queen Cleopatra VII became the last Macedonian to rule Egypt. She shared the throne with other members of her family until Egypt was conquered by the Romans. Egypt became part of the Roman Empire in 31 B.C. Cleopatra suspected that the Romans would parade her through Egypt to celebrate their victory. To avoid this humiliation, she committed suicide. Egypt would not govern itself again for almost 2,000 years.

✓ Reading Check What caused the decline of Egypt during the New Kingdom period?

Thutmose III finally assumed the throne after the death of his stepmother, Hatshepsut.



Section 2 Assessment

Key Terms

Review the key terms at the beginning of this section. Use each term in a sentence that explains its meaning.

Target Reading Skill

Find the word *incense* on page 78. Use context to figure out its meaning. What clues helped you to understand the meaning of *incense*?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

(a) **Identify** What unusual powers did Egyptians believe their kings had?

(b) Link Past and Present

Explain why Egypt's rulers had more authority than most rulers have today.

2. (a) **Recall** Describe some of the accomplishments of each of the three Egyptian kingdoms.

(b) **Compare** What characteristics did all three kingdoms have in common?

3. (a) **Generalize** Describe the New Kingdom under Thutmose III and during its later decline.

(b) **Analyze Information** Why do you think the pharaohs of Egypt were so successful for so long? What factors led to the decline of Egypt?

Writing Activity

Write a paragraph explaining the following statement: "Ancient Egypt was strongest when its rulers were strong."

Writing Tip Before you write, reread Section 2. Pay special attention to the parts of the text that describe Egypt's strongest pharaohs. Use the statement above as your topic sentence, the sentence that begins your paragraph.